

# CANADIAN DROWNING REPORT

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2024 EDITION



LIFESAVING SOCIETY®  
*The Lifeguarding Experts*

Prepared for Lifesaving Society  
Canada by the Drowning Prevention  
Research Centre Canada

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Drowning death rates were highest among males and older adults 65+



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20% of drowning deaths occurred in July



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Drowning deaths most frequently occurred in lakes and ponds with the highest rates in the territories



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Over half of all drowning deaths occurred during a recreational activity, most commonly swimming



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## What Were The Risk Factors?

Almost 80% of people who died while boating were not wearing a lifejacket

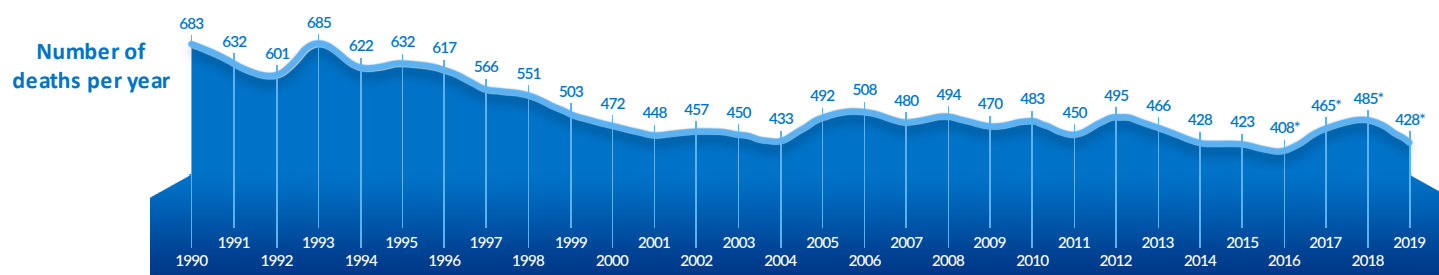


# DROWNING IN CANADA

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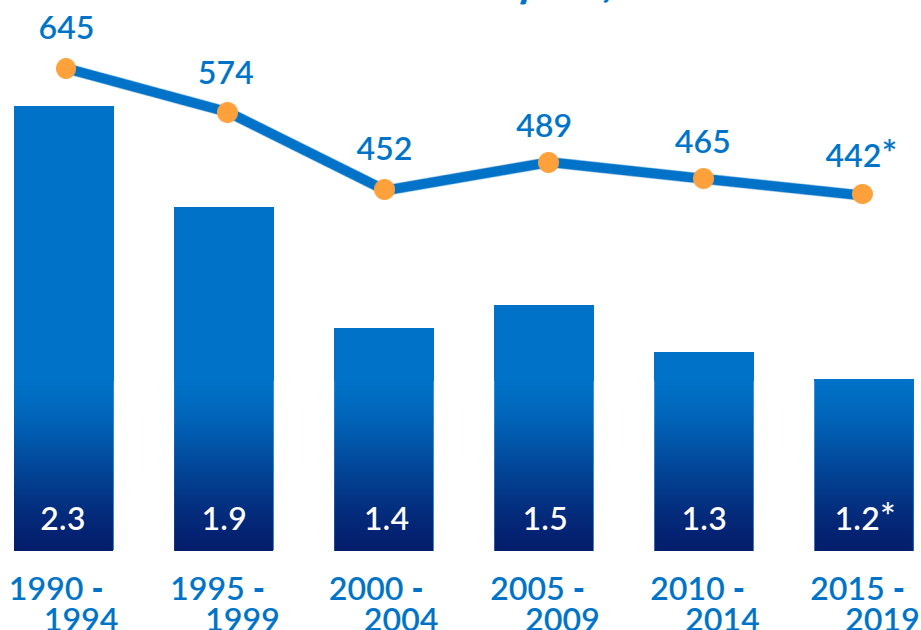
A total of 2,209 people lost their lives to unintentional drowning during 2015-2019, according to the most recent data from the Chief Coroners' and Medical Examiners' offices. After the lowest number of drowning deaths in decades was reported in 2016 (408 deaths), there was an increase in drowning deaths in Canada in 2017 (465 deaths), 2018 (485 deaths), and 2019 (428 deaths).

## Unintentional water-related deaths in Canada, 1990-2019



\*Total is based on partial data as not all data for British Columbia were available at the time of data collection for 2016-2019.

## Change in number of unintentional water-related deaths and death rates over 30 years, 1990-2019



An average of 442 water-related deaths occurred each year in the most current five-year period (2015-2019), down overall from an average of 465 drowning deaths per year in the previous five years (2010-2014). The average annual water-related death rate has decreased over the past 30 years, from 2.3 per 100,000 during 1990-1994 to 1.2 per 100,000 in the most recent data. Despite this long-term progress, over 400 people lose their lives each year as a result of this preventable cause of death.

Avg. death rate per year per 100,000 population      Avg. no. of deaths per year

\*Avg. number of deaths and death rate based on partial data as not all data for British Columbia were available at the time of data collection for 2016-2019.

# WHO IS DROWNING?

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Consistent with the overall reduction in the number of drowning deaths in Canada, drowning rates decreased in almost all age groups in 2015–2019 when compared to the previous five-year period (2010–2014).

**0–4 years**  
0.9 per 100,000 (4%)

20%

- The greatest decrease in drowning death rate occurred among children 0–4 years.
- Drowning rates decreased among children less than 5 from 1.1 per 100,000 in 2010–2014 to 0.9 in 2015–2019.

**5–14 years**  
0.6 per 100,000 (4%)

42%

- The lowest rates of drowning were among children 5–14 years of age.
- Drowning rates increased in this age group from 0.4 per 100,000 in 2010–2014 to 0.6 in 2015–2019.

**15–19 years**  
1.1 per 100,000 (5%)

12%

- Drowning rates decreased among teenagers 15–19 years from 1.3 per 100,000 in 2010–2014 to 1.1 in 2015–2019.

**20–34 years**  
1.3 per 100,000 (22%)

16%

- Drowning rates decreased among young adults 20–34 years from 1.6 per 100,000 in 2010–2014 to 1.3 in 2015–2019.

**35–49 years**  
1.1 per 100,000 (18%)

8%

- Drowning rates decreased among 35–49-year-olds from 1.2 per 100,000 in 2010–2014 to 1.1 in 2015–2019.

**50–64 years**  
1.3 per 100,000 (23%)

8%

- Drowning rates are second highest among adults 50–64 years (after older adults 65+).
- Drowning rates decreased among 50–64-year-olds from 1.5 per 100,000 in 2010–2014 to 1.3 per 100,000 in 2015–2019.

**65+ years**  
1.6 per 100,000 (23%)

11%

- The highest rates of drowning were among adults 65 years of age and older.
- Drowning rates decreased among older adults from 1.9 per 100,000 in 2010–2014 to 1.6 per 100,000 in 2015–2019.

An average of 343 males and 98 females died from drowning each year during 2015–2019.

**4x** Males drowned at rates over four times as high as females (1.9 per 100,000 vs 0.5 per 100,000).



# WHO IS DROWNING?

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## Unintentional water-related deaths and death rates by age, 2015–2019

### Age 50–54

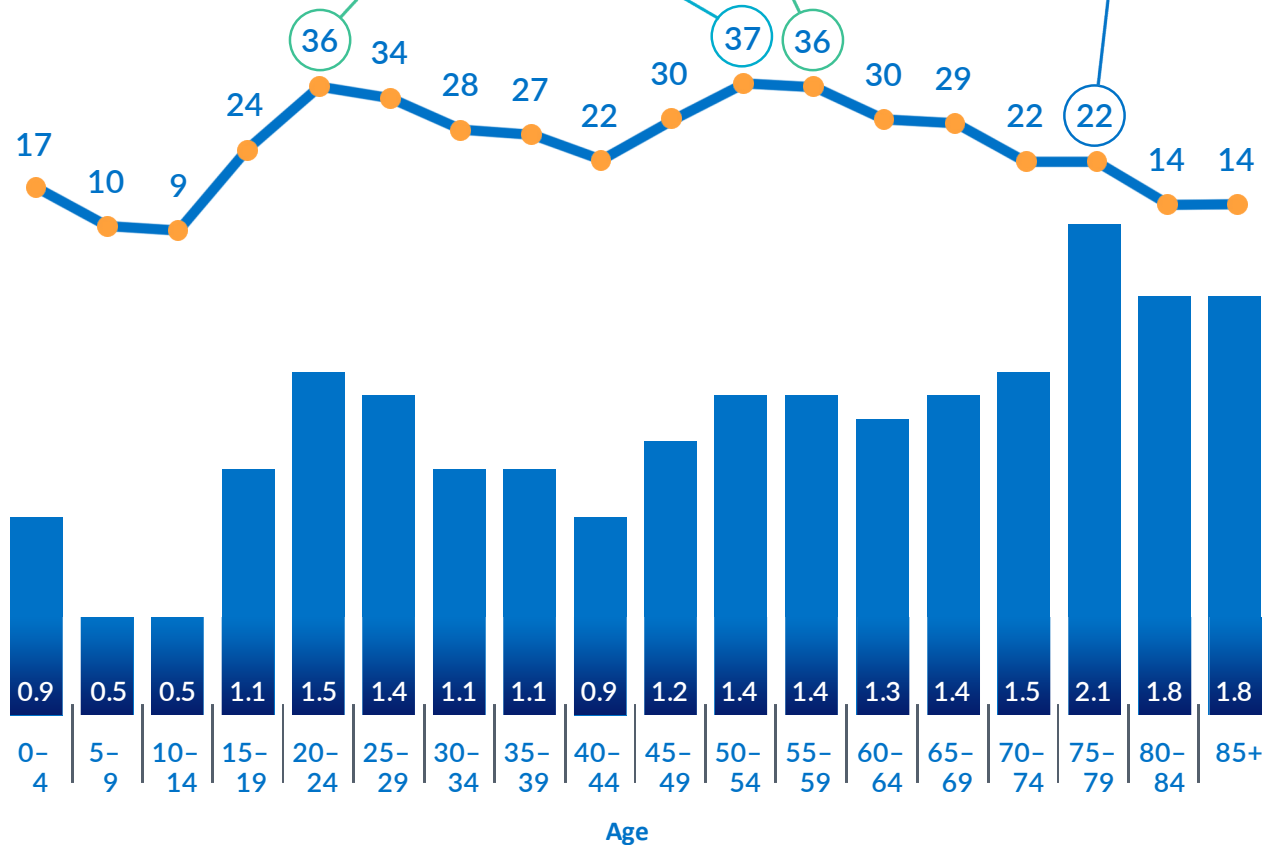
The highest average number of drowning deaths each year occurred among 50–54-year-olds (37 deaths).

### Age 20–24 & 55–59

There was also a high number of deaths among 20–24-year-olds and 55–59-year-olds each year (36 deaths in each age group).

### Age 75–79

Older adults 75–79 years of age had the highest drowning death rates of all age groups (2.1 per 100,000).

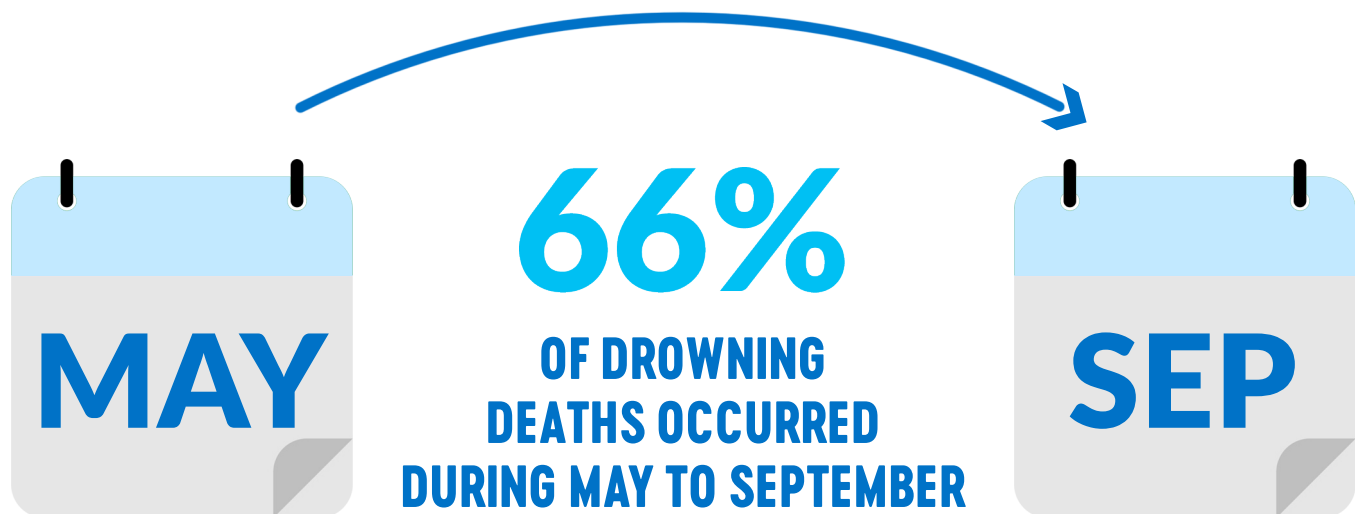
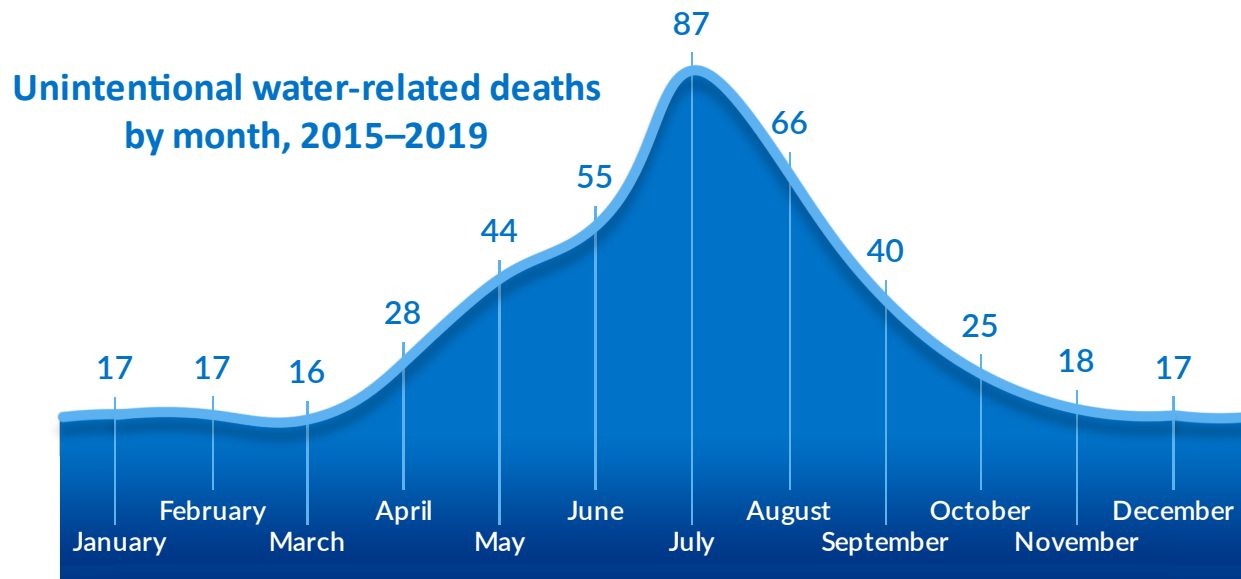


■ Avg. death rate per year per 100,000 population —●— Avg. no. of deaths per year

# WHEN ARE THEY DROWNING?

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Although water-related deaths occur in every month of the year, the majority occur during the warmest months. Drowning most frequently occurred in July, with an average of 87 deaths occurring in July each year from 2015–2019 (20%).



Drowning most frequently occurred on Sunday, with an average of 88 deaths occurring on Sunday each year during 2015–2019 (20%).

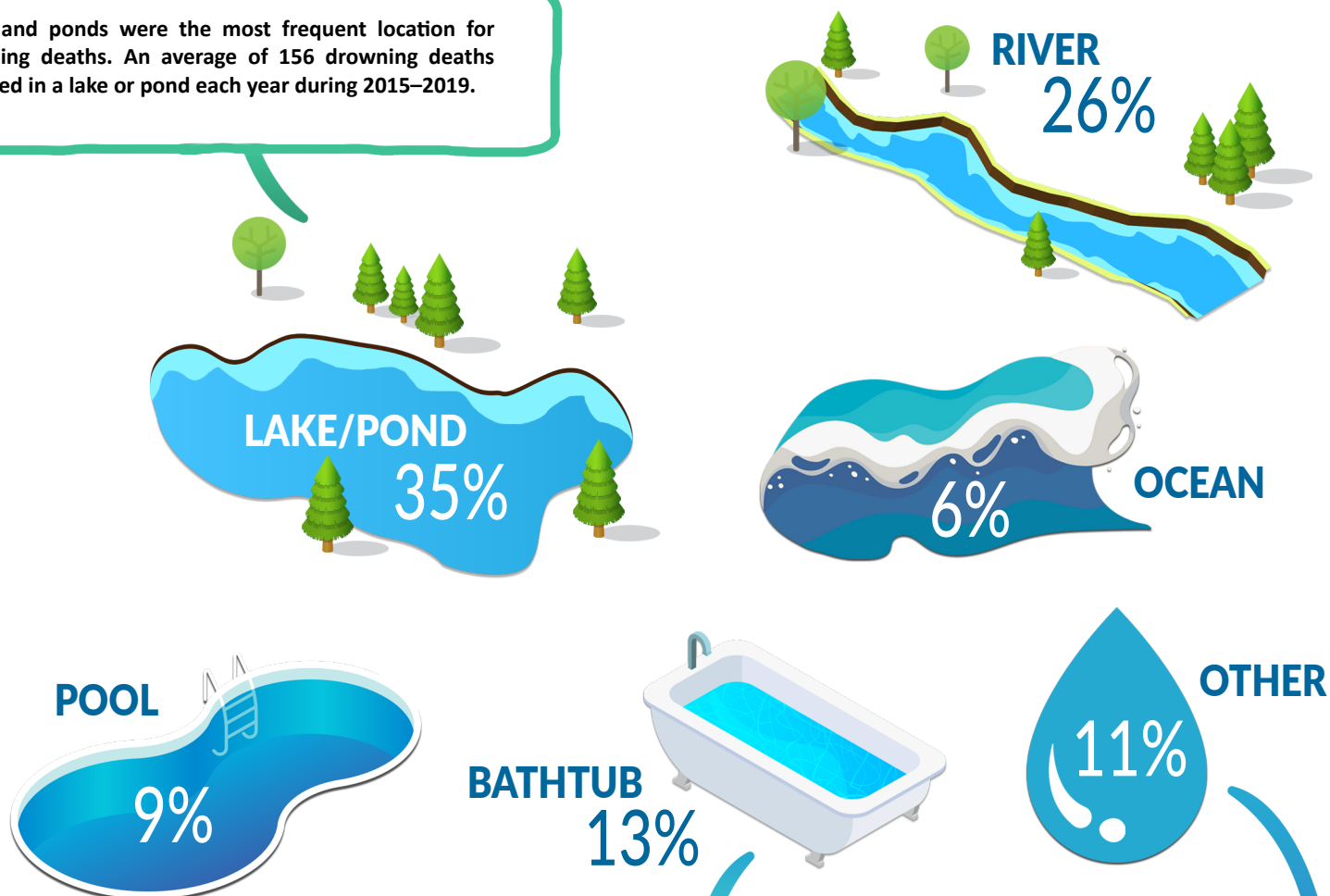


# WHERE ARE THEY DROWNING?

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The majority of water-related deaths in Canada occur in natural bodies of water such as lakes, ponds or rivers.

Lakes and ponds were the most frequent location for drowning deaths. An average of 156 drowning deaths occurred in a lake or pond each year during 2015–2019.



Despite the overall reduction in drowning in recent years, deaths in bathtubs increased. During 2015–2019 there were an average of 59 bathtub drowning deaths each year, compared to an average of 44 each year in 2010–2014.

Most (90%) pool-related drowning deaths occurred in private pools. When information about pool fencing was known, 60% of the private pools where a drowning death occurred had no fence present or a non-compliant fence.

Other bodies of water where drowning deaths occurred included hot tubs, ditches, canals, marshes, bogs, swamps, dams, quarries, dugouts and retention ponds.

Few drowning deaths occurred in lifeguard-supervised settings, such as public pools and waterfronts. During 2015–2019, 1% of all water-related deaths occurred in a setting supervised by lifeguards.

1%



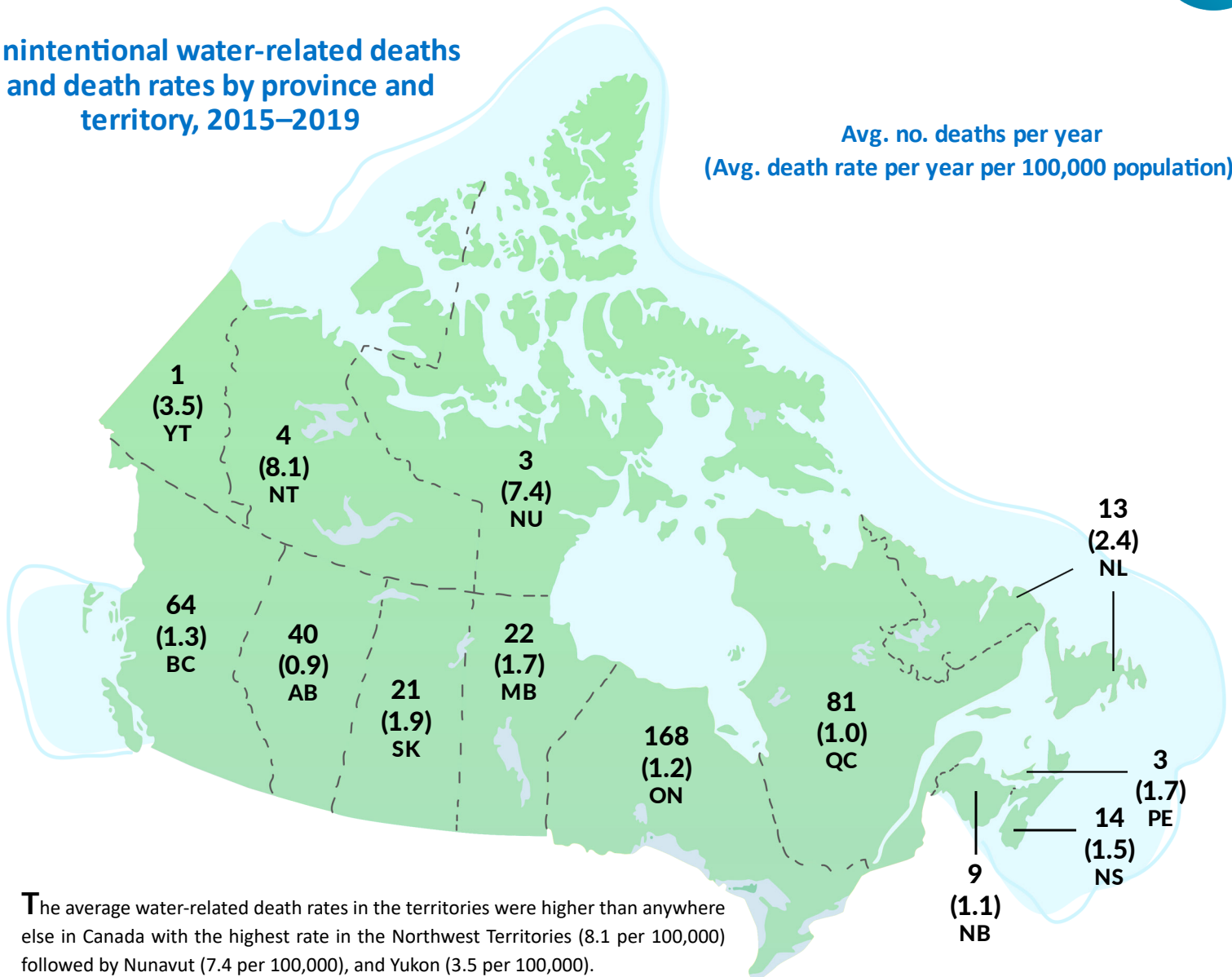


# WHERE ARE THEY DROWNING?

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## Unintentional water-related deaths and death rates by province and territory, 2015–2019

Avg. no. deaths per year  
(Avg. death rate per year per 100,000 population)



The average water-related death rates in the territories were higher than anywhere else in Canada with the highest rate in the Northwest Territories (8.1 per 100,000) followed by Nunavut (7.4 per 100,000), and Yukon (3.5 per 100,000).

After the territories, the next highest rates occurred in Newfoundland and Labrador (2.4 per 100,000) and Saskatchewan (1.9 per 100,000).

Consistent with the overall decrease in drowning death rates in Canada, rates decreased in most provinces and territories in 2015–2019. However, drowning deaths more than doubled in Prince Edward Island in 2015–2019 compared to 2010–2014.

More people drowned in rural environments than live there. Less than 20% of the Canadian population lives in a rural area, yet during 2015–2019, 36% of all drowning deaths occurred in a rural area.

URBAN  
64%

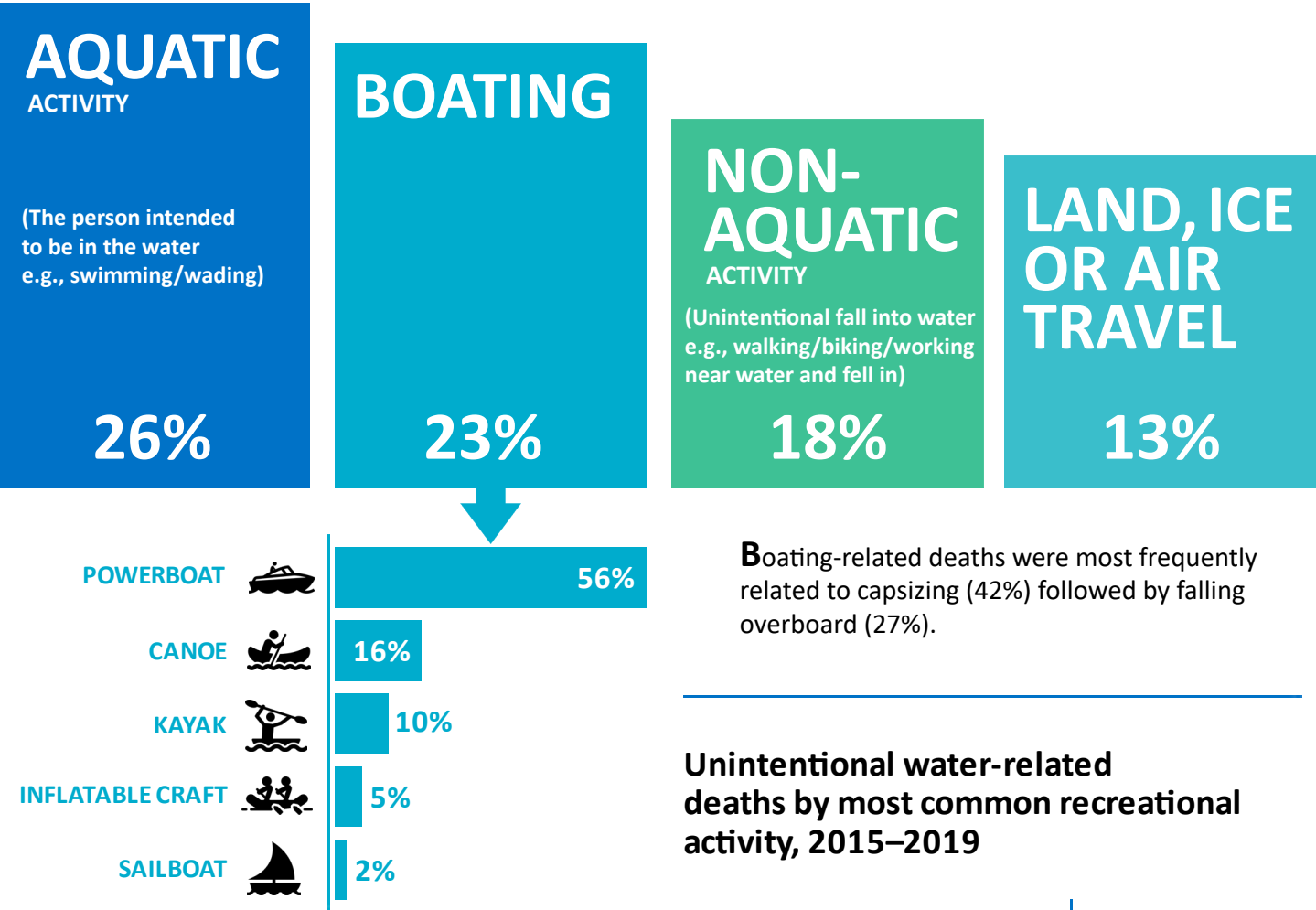
RURAL  
36%






# WHAT WERE THEY DOING?


Unintentional water-related deaths by type of activity, 2015–2019




# WHAT WERE THE RISK FACTORS?




Not wearing a lifejacket




Weak or non-swimmer




Supervision absent




Cold water




Consuming alcohol




Alone




Alone near water




Heart disease/  
sudden cardiac event



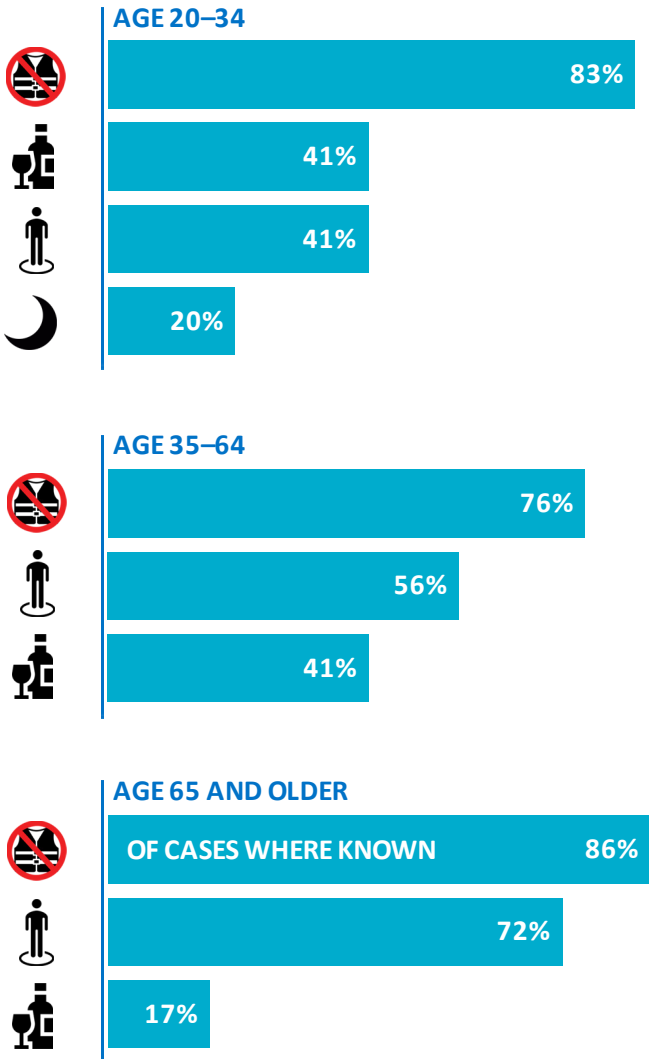
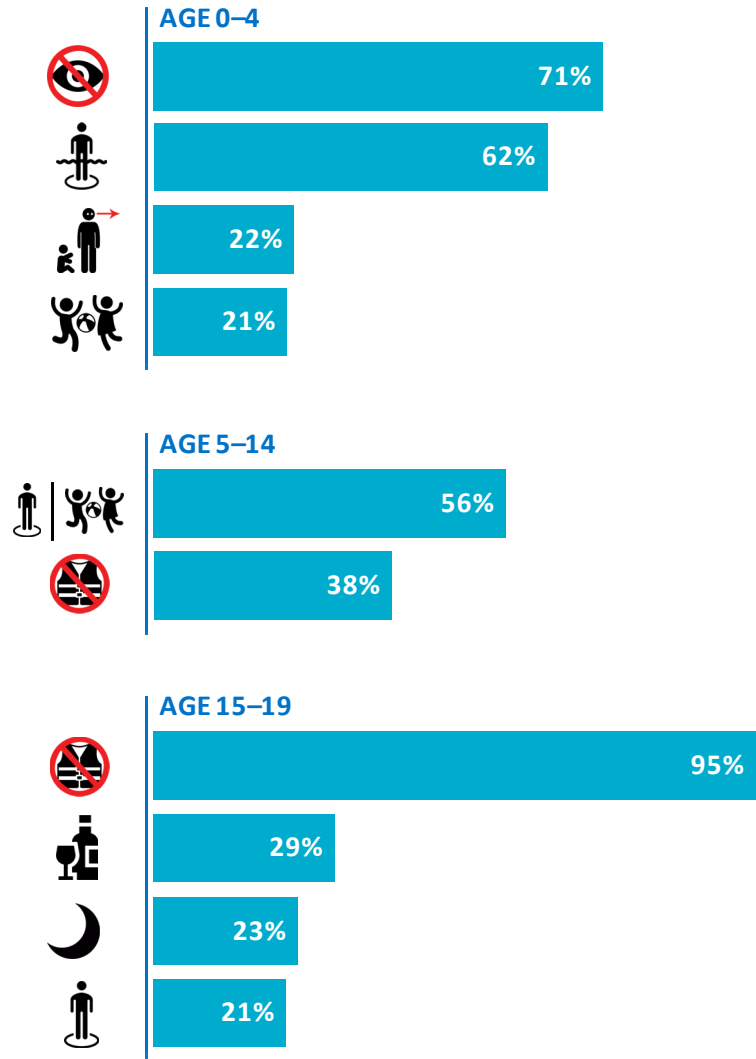
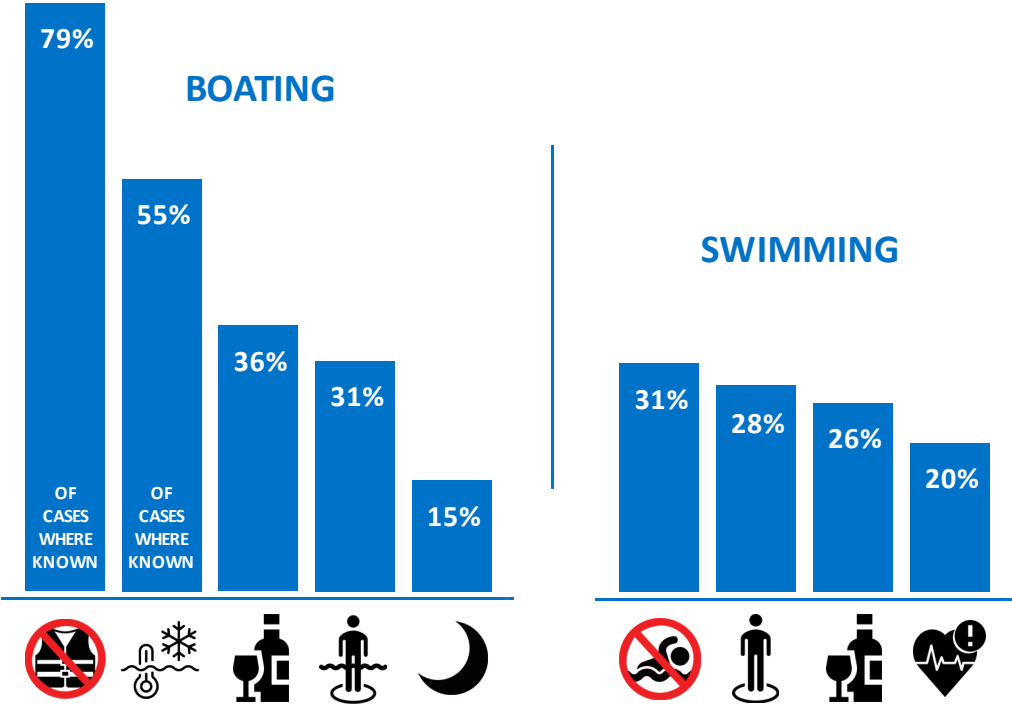
After dark



With other minors only



Supervision present  
but distracted



# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The drowning research process involves data collection, tabulation and analysis. Water-related death data is extracted from the offices of the Chief Coroners and Medical Examiners in each province/territory. This research:

- Collects the data needed to profile victims of aquatic incidents, including circumstances and contributing factors.
- Includes all deaths in each province/territory resulting from incidents “in, on, or near” water; “near-water” incidents were included if the incident was closely related to water-based recreational, vocational or daily living activity or if the presence of water appeared to contribute to the activity.
- Includes only unintentional deaths. It does not include deaths due to natural causes, suicide or homicide.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the support, co-operation and efforts of:

- The Chief Coroners’ and the Chief Medical Examiners’ offices in each province/territory, who permitted and facilitated confidential access to the Coroners’ reports on unintentional water-related deaths that provided the base data for this report.
- The volunteers who contributed their time and energy to extract data on preventable water-related deaths from Coroners’ files.

## THE LIFESAVING SOCIETY

The Lifesaving Society — Canada’s lifeguarding experts — works to prevent drowning and water-related injury through its training programs, Water Smart® public education, aquatic safety management, drowning research, and lifesaving sport. More than a million Canadians participate in the Society’s swimming, lifesaving, lifeguard and leadership training programs every year. The Society sets the standard for aquatic safety in Canada and certifies Canada’s National Lifeguards.



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## DROWNING PREVENTION RESEARCH CENTRE CANADA



The Drowning Prevention Research Centre Canada (DPRC) is the lead agency for drowning and water-incident research in Canada. The DPRC conducts research into fatal and non-fatal drowning, significant aquatic injury and rescue interventions. Contact the DPRC by phone 416-490-8844 or email [info@dprc-crpn.ca](mailto:info@dprc-crpn.ca) or visit [www.dprc-crpn.ca](http://www.dprc-crpn.ca).